



Martin J. Beckman, 1924 – 2017

Martin J. Beckmann, who taught at Brown from 1959 until his retirement in 1989, passed away last weekend. Born in 1924 in Ratingen, Germany, he earned his doctorate at the University of Freiburg in 1950. After serving as Research Associate and Assistant Professor of Economics at Yale from 1951 to 1959, he joined Brown's Department of Economics as an Associate Professor in that year, becoming full Professor in 1961. During 1962 – 69, he was simultaneously Professor of Econometrics, Operations Research and Economics at the University of Bonn, and from 1969, he held a simultaneous appointment as Professor of Applied Mathematics at the Technical University in Munich, Germany. Beckmann retained a residence in Providence and frequently worked at the University libraries, continuing to publish manuscripts for many years after becoming Professor Emeritus at Brown.

Beckmann described his own research in *A Biographical Dictionary of Major Economists* edited by Mark Blaug by saying that his early work focused on competitive spatial market equilibrium and on the efficient utilization of transportation facilities. His interests then shifted to sequential decision-making as exemplified by inventory and production control, and to the economic insights from dynamic programming. Then, influenced by Jacob Marschak, he was motivated to study the economics of organizations, especially economic functions of supervision and rank. He maintained an interest in economics of transportation, location theory, regional science, and urban economics. "Perhaps my best known contribution" he stated, was "a simple model explaining the quantitative relationships in a central place hierarchy and the distribution of city sizes."

Two former colleagues and emeritus professors sent remarks on hearing of Beckmann's passing. "When I came to Brown in 1971," wrote Allan Feldman, "Martin was one of the best known researchers in the department. ... He taught a popular urban economics course at

Brown. In that course, once per semester, he led his students on a long hike in the city of Providence, discussing things like rent gradients, location theory, manufacturing, retail sales, and so on. He and his wife Gloria were friendly and sociable, and fine parents to four children.” At the end of long departmental seminars, “Martin would raise his hand and make a brilliant and insightful comment ... something that the speaker could use to significantly improve his paper.”

Another, Vernon Henderson, remarked that he had studied Beckmann’s text on location theory as a graduate student. It “was the only one of its kind.” In the economics profession nationally and internationally, Beckmann was one of the most respected economists at Brown for many years. He was also known for his love of travel, would be off to locations around the world regularly, and was known for his joy of life and love of good stories.